

The ETERNAL WALL by R. Z. GALLUN

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STORIES



AFTER AN AGE

EPIC FULL LENGTH NOVEL! By FANDO BINDER

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "After An Age"

Back cover painting by James B. Settles depicting the "Airship Of Io"

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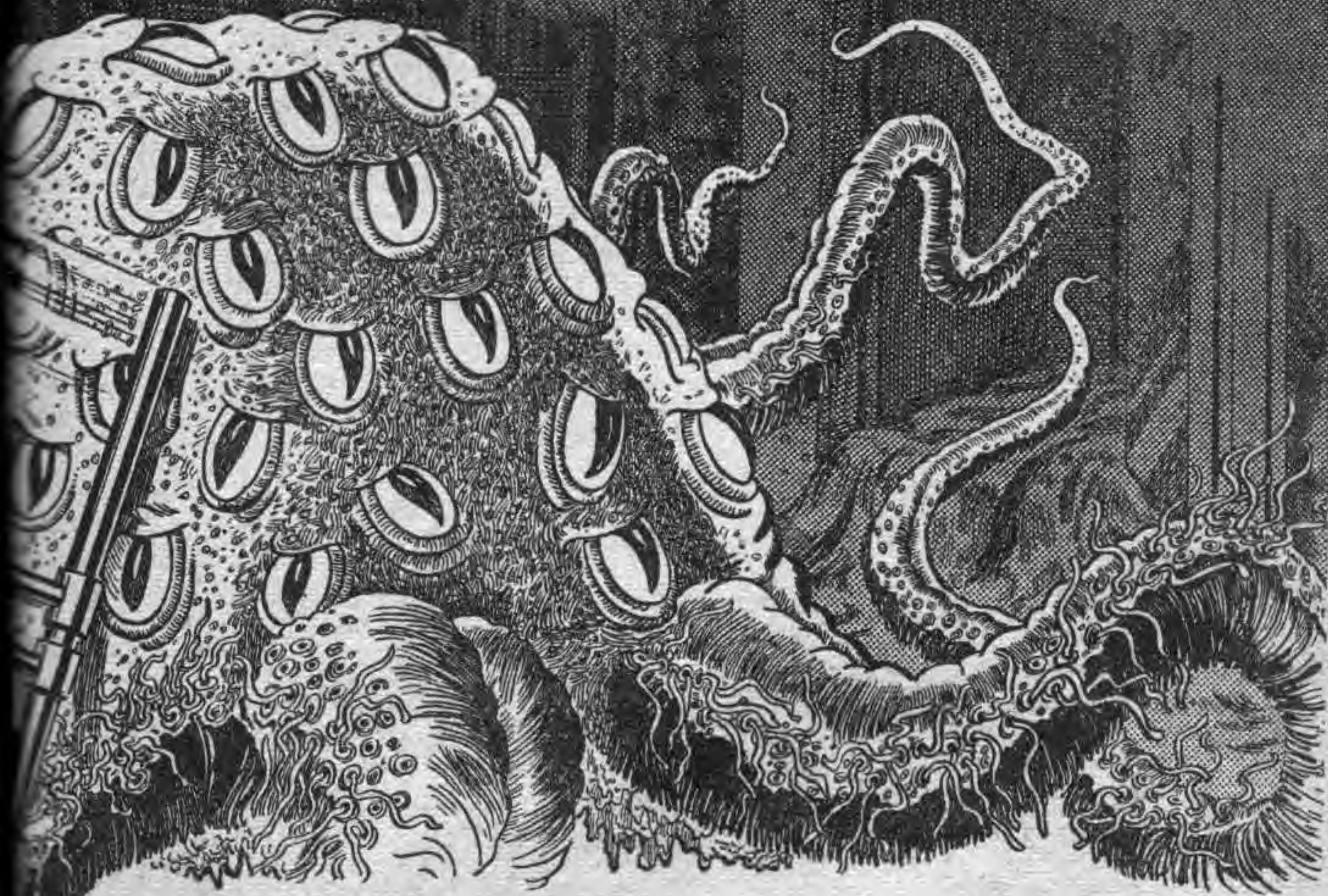
Juggernaut Jones

When salesman Juggernaut Jones goes out to sell planes, he creates a market if it doesn't exist!



Juggernaut Jones grabbed a metal chair and swung it in a desperate attack against the octopus-like monster

EXPRESSMAN



by **A. R. Mc KENZIE**

SPACEGRAM To: V. Parker Jones,
Sales Manager, Martian Division, Port
Terrestrial, Mars:

*No. No. No. Keep away from
Martian Piscites. Refuse to authorize
any such (deleted) campaign as you
suggest. Fate of Mars depends on
Piscites' unhampered solution of most
critical situation in planet's history.
No market there, now or ever, even
for Uneek Fliers' new 1½-ton, 26-jet
hypo-magnesium stratoexpress. Uneek
Fliers, Inc. approves my suggestion
that you take three months' vacation
with pay effective at once. Have ar-
ranged first-class passage for you on
spaceliner, INTERVOID, leaving Port
Terrestrial on maiden voyage to Altair*

*Planetary System. This is an order.
Leave Mars immediately. If you go
within a thousand miles of Piscity, I'll
kill you with my own bare hands.*

Harmon T. Dee,
Manager Interplanetary Sales, Uneek
Fliers, Inc., New Chicago, Earth.

"Smart man—that boss of yours,"
Captain Smith said as he handed the
message through the bars of the Space-
queen's washroom door. "Only, know-
ing you as I do, Fatty, Altair wouldn't
have been half far enough away." He
opened the door. "We're over Piscity.
I guess now we can safely let you out."

I emerged in haughty silence. For
some reason, there exists among Mars'
rowdier element, a conviction that I,

V. Parker Jones, the most resourceful and unappreciated salesman in the field of low-cost atmospheric planes, have an irresistible attraction for trouble. I concede that my recent campaign on Asteroid Aveston—in which I not only performed the stupendous feat of selling airplanes to birds but soundly whipped my bitterest rival, a Mr. Joe Karp of Globe Gliders, Inc.—was not without destructive qualities. But such were coincidental.

Certainly that, and Captain Smith's explanation of, "It may save us all a lot of grief" was no reason for me being held prisoner in the Spacequeen's wash-room all during our flight from Port Terrestrial across the northern Oxidized deserts to the influential but extremely unsocial Piscites of Mars' polar regions.

"Your high-handedness," I said, "will be brought to the attention of authorities. As will the fact that I was refused passage on every ship but this monstrosity."

"And you know why," Captain Smith said. "You're dynamite, Juggernaut. Didn't you burn down a mountain on Quakerton, and burn up Aveston's entire monetary system, and bang up my space freighter so bad doing both that it's fit only for these stratosphere runs?"

"But I sold—"

"Blundering luck. Harmon T. should have had you jailed. With the Piscites working frantic twenty-four-and-a-half hour shifts, trying to keep Mars breathing, it's criminal to turn a bungler like you loose among 'em. That's Piscity below."

I immediately sensed foul play as I gazed down upon a glossy ocean, from which protruded three giant chimneys, and across the nearby southern coastline which was barren of life.

"Piscity?" I said darkly. "Where?"

Captain Smith groaned. "He's head

of the entire Martian sales force but he doesn't know a thing about the most advanced race on the planet!"

THE statement, of course, was untrue. Since my position requires I keep abreast not only with late models such as Uneek's new 1½-ton strato-express but with all allied products such as the recently-marketed magnesium-fueled cigar lighter, I merely had not had the time to investigate the Piscites as thoroughly as is my custom among prospects.

I understood, naturally, that these reserved peoples had assumed the task of maintaining Mars' atmosphere and that lately they had encountered transportation difficulties. It was quite natural, considering that their assets listed not a single atmospheric plane or truck, that I immediately attempt to interest them in the finest product available—a Uneek Flier.

By selling them, I would aid Mars. The resultant publicity might regain the ground we had lost to our bitterest rival, Globe Gliders, in a previous competitive test on Glock Desert.

Although the incentive of competition would be lacking because the unscrupulous Mr. Joe Karp must certainly have perished when his crude repulser-ray Glider crashed on Aveston, the knowledge that the fate of Mars might rest upon my muscular shoulders more than filled this gap.

I had anticipated Harmon T.'s veto and had completed all arrangements before cabling him my intention. That he had attempted bribery to stop me—utilizing a three-month paid vacation plus passage to a distant system—confirmed my suspicions.

"That gentleman," I told Captain Smith, "is jealous. Uneek Fliers badly needs a far-sighted, virile representative such as I to head its New Chicago

office. But since he now stagnates in that position—”

“Water!” came a wild screech.

A man burst into the control room and flung his exceedingly thin but astonishingly familiar body for the wash-room.

“Some blasted fool,” he shouted, “left the water—Juggernaut!” he howled. “You did it. Smith, this crazy coot left the basin plug in. Water’s been running down a seam behind the mirror. It’s a foot deep in the fuel room and—yowie!” The Spacequeen shuddered as a stern rocket missed three beats. “It’s starting. Every tube’ll be damped out in two minutes.”

Captain Smith moaned. “Only *he* could do it! Karp, I told you we were nuts to bring this fathead along. Nobody, not even us, could keep him from messing up the Piscites’ work.”

Mr. Joe Karp of Globe Gliders, Inc., had, obviously, survived the Aveston crash. The forward tubes suddenly blanked out and the Spacequeen started madly downward.

“A most diabolical plot,” I said calmly as we rushed to our deaths. “You, Mr. Karp, brought me here to this secluded spot to hurl my broken body to an uncharted grave. You planned, then, to go on to the real Piscity and peddle your inferior product without fear of my proven ability to—”

“Oh, stop blubbering,” Mr. Karp said. “There’s no danger. This jalopy is still space-tight. She’ll hold water.”

I made a series of lightning calculations.

“I compute,” I said, “that the Spacequeen will float at approximately five-eighths submerged.”

Captain Smith frowned. “The shore’s in gliding range.”

“But a water landing would simplify contacts,” Mr. Karp said. “We could

watch Juggy better, too. With the rockets dead, there’ll be no danger. Let’s try it. This elephant may be right for once.”

I REMAINED calm, ignoring even the slanderous remarks concerning my physical self. Following my suggestions, Captain Smith made a passable dead-rocket landing close to the projecting chimneys. We encountered only one obstruction as we plunged to the bottom. Coated with a peculiar unctuous fluid which seemed to permeate this northern sea, we crashed through a structure composed of coral slabs, liberating thousands of marble-sized red balls which promptly bubbled surfaceward to disintegrate with greasy pops upon striking sunlight.

We struck gently upon the sea bottom and the only water to enter our ship came as the space-lock doors were hurriedly opened and closed to admit a creature which immediately charged, waving hideous tentacles and glaring through dozens of green eyes sprinkled about its octopus-like body.

“Courage!” I shouted to my terrified companions and bludgeoned a chair down, sending our attacker twisting back in its death throes.

The space lock promptly disgorged a horde of these vile things. I was overpowered. Clammy tentacles convulsed about my throat, two steely clips fastened to my cheek bones and straightway a metallic voice began shrieking.

“Which one of you blasted humans slugged President Karlut?”

Captain Smith and Mr. Karp pointed fiendishly at me just as the Piscite, who had blundered under the chair I had been offering him, came erect on his tentacles.

“I’ve seen fat humans before,” he said, his choked voice audible over the

bone-conducting vibratones these unsocial, amphibious Piscites use to converse with surface dwellers, "but if this isn't the fattest, funniest—ho, brother! Take him away before I go into another spasm. Who got the smart idea of smashing up our thrilium warehouse?"

I courageously assumed the responsibility—my decision in no way influenced by the fact that this underwater dignitary was already studying my sheet of figures on which was evident my slight miscalculation of computing earth density against Martian weights plus neglecting to add cargo tonnage consisting of a complete line of Mr. Karp's inferior repulser-ray Gliders and my own hypo-magnesium Uneek demonstrators.

"For a guy who couldn't punch his way through a mess of amoebas," President Karlut said, "the damage you can do is staggering."

"Damage?" I said soothingly. "Surely, a few red balls—"

"A few red balls, he says! He sends a ten years' reserve of thrilium oxide—the last ounce we can find in the mines below us—to be destroyed by sunlight, and then asks what damage? Lock him up, men, and spread the bad news. We'll have just about time to say our prayers before the Sea of Piscar is solid ice."

MY heated space suit performed admirably in the water-choked Piscity jail, and the bars of my isolation cell withstood even the most savage assault by my fellow prisoners.

The vibratones and a speech converter, inserted in the escape valve of my helmet, made conversation with the Piscites possible but not too pleasing. They continued threshing about the submerged lockup room in what, I quickly understood, was a vain effort

to keep warm.

"Ten years' supply of thrilium," they kept chattering. "Last ball we could find in these southern mines. Gone! We've got a mere thirty hours' supply left in the compounding bins. When that runs out, the compounded gas stops pouring from the surface chimneys, the atmosphere thins, space cold creeps in and the Sea of Piscar goes as solid as your head. Hundreds of years we've been freezing ourselves and fouling our water with the hydrocarbons to keep the atmosphere up until you surface guys can find some way to crack the desert oxides. Now you wipe out everything."

They were, of course, delirious from cold. Not until I removed my glove to push my new cigar lighter in through my suit's chest outlet valve, did I realize how frigid their medium really was. Their instability of mind, however, was apparent directly after I lighted my cigar, though I did not immediately discover the reason for their maniacal charge upon my cell since I was momentarily facing death by suffocation from the smoke of one expensive Plantation Delight.

Not until I had hastily thrust the cigar through the outlet valve was I able to perceive it was the cigar lighter, not my predicament, which had produced the confusion.

"Heat!" they chattered.

I handed over the lighter, explaining as I did the qualities of my company's latest allied product, it being my custom never to overlook a possible sale.

"As you know," I said, "the fuel is identical with the high-octaned hypo-magnesium used in all our atmospheric Uneeks, even to our most recent model, a 1½-ton, 26-jet stratoexpress which has all controls and chambers hermetically sealed. And speaking of Uneeks, you are perhaps unaware that, whereas

our nearest competitor relies on antiquated, ground-contacting repulser rays for propulsion and is therefore extremely unwieldy over mountainous terrain and—ah—deep water, all late model Uneeks are able to soar above the most rugged country or deepest ocean without the slightest—”

“Oh, chop it off, Fatty,” one said. “What on Mars would us fish want with an atmospheric plane! Just show us how this cigar lighter works.”

Smiling at their ignorance of the fundamentals of combustion, I nevertheless flipped the control and was further amused at their surprise as the wick burst into flame.

They snatched the lighter and went paddling about the lockup, holding the flare joyfully to their tentacles, giving me an opportunity to weigh my situation. From my cell window, I looked down on roofless stores and weed-festooned streets crammed with confused Piscites. Many swam up to hurl unprintable epithets through my window, detracting slightly from my calm, analytical survey.

CONCISELY, I found I must accomplish two objectives: (1) gain an order for atmospheric planes from fish in sufficient volume to pacify jealous Harmon T. whose spacegram to the effect that I was once again discharged must even now be on my desk at Port Terrestrial. (2) Save Mars.

Difficult as that appeared, I found these further complications: (1) I was in jail, accused of assault and of destroying a ten years' supply of thrilium from which the Piscites compounded an atmosphere by a process no doubt elementary to a man of my background had I time to study it. (2) Mr. Karp was at large, engaged in making the first, all-important contacts.

My fine was impossible to compute.

“What you've done, Fatty,” the magistrate said, “is to destroy centuries of Piscite progress, to say nothing of the other Martian races.”

“Fiddlesticks,” I said, “you need only to mine more thrilium, or substitute another element.”

The judge made a feeble attempt to puncture a large yellow globule which had bubbled up from the floor beside his desk.

“Element?” he gurgled. “Substitute? Blubberface, do you know where this thrilium originally came from?”

“Naturally.”

“Naturally, my tentacle! Thrilium, half-wit, is a lightweight metallic substance, impossible to scale, but which, in a chloridic solution, liberates a startling amount of gas similar to the upper atmosphere. These tiny red balls are found in just two huge meteoric fragments below the hydrocarbon strata. You know what thrilium is?”

“Certainly.”

“Amazing. Us Piscites haven't even figured it out yet. We believe thrilium to be a substance compounded by the lost race of Planet Five—the planet which exploded into the Asteroid Belt. As I say, two fragments hit Mars. We control both. One here directly beneath us; the other far to the north in waters much too cold for us to endure. To reach and exhaust this southern deposit below us, we had to blast far below the hydrocarbon strata, thus polluting our water with the crudes.”

“Then you've exhausted this southern fragment?”

“You catch on fast.”

“But the northern deposit?”

The judge shivered. “Only one suicide squad was able to penetrate that frigid area. Before its members died, they managed to mine and cache a few odd tons. However, a rough survey reveals enough unmined thrilium

there to last Mars a thousand more years. But we have no way of transporting the ore in the volume we need, even if we *could* work the deposit."

THE solution was childish. But before I spoke the words which would not only save Mars but gain me the deluge of orders I needed to satisfy Harmon T., I ventured one more question.

"This thrilium," I asked, recalling the reactions which occurred when my hypo-magnesium blasts contacted other unknown materials, "will it burn?"

"Thrilium," the judge said, "positively will not burn, explode, ignite or oxidize under any condition or in any medium."

"Then," I said, "you will purchase from my company—at a reasonable discount if in sufficient volume—a supply of hypo-magnesium rocket tubes. You will ignite these along your ocean bottom and raise the temperature of your medium to a point where you may mine the northern waters in comfort."

"A capital suggestion," the judge admitted. "To raise our ocean's temperature one degree, we would require about forty-seven million more rocket tubes than your stupid company could manufacture in as many years. Further, thanks to you, we have less than thirty hours to do it in. And finally, there is the small matter of fast delivery. With the mines directly under our compounders, it took us sixty years to accumulate the reserve you destroyed. Now that our only other available supply is hundreds of miles away, even you should see the trouble we'd have keeping the compounders rolling day-to-day—providing, by some miracle, that frigid area can be mined.

"Being unable to compute your fine, the court assesses you one cigar lighter

and hopes some less kindly fool breaks your fool neck."

I found President Karlut in the compounding building's tap room, drowning his troubles in shots of concentrated oxygen. Mr. Karp, in suit, was clinging to the Piscite's weakest tentacle.

Captain Smith, I learned, had remained aboard the Spacequeen to estimate his damages—another factor I must consider, for Captain Smith was, as I had previously discovered, a very mercenary individual who insisted on moneys due him or the equivalent in man-hours worked in potato-peeling bondage.

"You've got nearly thirty hours, Mr. Karlut," Mr. Karp was shouting. "You've also got enough thrilium cached up north to hold you a couple months—time enough to start mining—providing you can obtain some quick means of transporting that two months' supply."

"Providing," President Karlut hiccupped.

"But I can supply that," Mr. Karp cried. "Picture it: a sleek, shining new water-proof Glider express. Hundreds, all boasting a full 2-ton capacity; all hurling their powerful rays against the sea bottom, gaining added drive from the thicker medium, as they speed about their under-water job of world-salvation."

Mr. Karp's unscrupulousness will never be better illustrated. Consider the facts: I had, in the Spacequeen, one new 1½-ton, 26-jet stratoexpress demonstrator. In jail, I had proven that a hypo-magnesium flare will operate under water. From the judge, I had drawn the facts, concerning the transportation troubles which had brought me to Piscity.

LEAVING court, I had rushed for President Karlut, to find Mr. Karp

screaming out my plan. I attached myself to President Karlut's nearest tentacle.

"Since," I said kindly, "I originated the idea, I feel it my duty to recommend the proper ship. A revolutionary new 26-jet Uneek; a ship, daring to sacrifice tonnage for power; a job guaranteed to out-speed and out-pull all competing products; a water-heating masterpiece completely justifying its slightly higher cost by its ability to maintain flight above the deepest—"

"May I impress one fact upon you two bums," President Karlut interrupted, dragging us into the compounding room. "Transportation or no, there isn't a Piscite miner swimming who can survive the northern cold. Neither is there a surface creature, even in a suit, able to take the terrific pressure below the hydrocarbons." He guided us to a large bin. "The two months' supply cached up north and the thrilium right here is our last."

"In this bin?" I asked.

The door catch was faulty. In no other way could that door have suddenly popped open and sent the last remaining thrilium ball, together with a number of odd fatty globules, flying upward to destruction.

"I won't kill you, Fatty," President Karlut said. "That would be too much pleasure for one man to enjoy in these sorrowful times. You, however, are going to climb into your pop-buggy, go north and express back a load of thrilium equal to the amount you have just destroyed. And I hope you freeze your—"

"A splendid idea," Mr. Karp cried. "We'll *both* bring back a load. A perfect test for the respective merits of our product—the winner, naturally, to receive the order which may save Mars."

As we unshipped our craft, Captain

Smith showed me a column of discouraging figures.

"A complete cleaning and refueling job," he said, "plus derricks and men to beach the Spacequeen. Sell good, Baldy, else it's back to skinning potatoes for you."

Both expresses proved sea-worthy. I left Piscity at reduced speed, experimenting with various maneuvers so, when the crisis arrived as it must, I would be prepared. However, President Karlut, who had decided to ride with me part way, grew annoyed.

"You are now," he said, "heading straight towards the bottom. I'd say your ship, strangely enough, *is* the fastest and most powerful—if you could only run it. That lever fires the topside rocket bank, idiot; you pull it now and we'll take a loop."

"Ridiculous," I said and pulled.

Cleverly righting the ship, I was startled to find several young Piscites paddling along outside, enjoying the hypo-mag blasts.

"They'll be killed!" I cried and reached for the throttle only to find it already full on.

PRESIDENT KARLUT groaned. "If that's your top speed, we're licked. Fat, even if the northern deposit *was* mineable, we compute we'd need a thousand 5-ton transports, working twenty-four and a half hour shifts at better than one hundred miles an hour to keep us going. You're making 15 miles per. At that rate, the combined flier companies of the system couldn't supply us. Open those doors, Baldy; I'm getting out here."

Mr. Karp, shivering in a cold which penetrated even our heated suits, watched me load the sealed cases of thrilium.

"Your ship *is* fast and punchy," he admitted. "Too bad you can't operate

it. Now we'll run this contest fair and square. When I count three, we go."

Mr. Karp, of course, was hiding a broken heart. Even he had conceded my superior speed and power. And since such would be key factors, his defeat was certain.

Knowing Mr. Karp's flare for trickery, I yanked back the starting lever the instant he wigwagged "two," and went thundering backward just as he shot forward. Making a lightning calculation, I flipped the proper control. Both doors of the space lock flew open and a great deal of water, plus a discouraging amount of debris churned from the bottom by Mr. Karp's backward-thrusting repulsers, poured upon me.

Having removed my space suit, death by drowning seemed not at all unlikely.

However, in emergencies, my rapidity of thought is astounding. I played *all* the levers. The doors snapped shut, checking the deluge. It was then a simple matter to back the stratoexpress out of the mine shaft and send it flying after Mr. Karp's inferior Glider.

My calmness in remaining at my post, waist deep in icy water, was characteristic. I had a race to win, reward or no. That my ship was proven superior and would certainly win by miles was purely coincidental.

I raised Mr. Karp's sluggish Glider about mid-race. Sounding a warning blast with my forward rockets, I yanked the throttle full on, preparatory to roaring past my arch enemy to victory. Quite abruptly, I found myself upside down, head submerged, racing top speed to the rear.

"Strange," I thought.

Making necessary corrections, I again attempted to shoot ahead only to find myself progressing sideways in a series of most annoying rolls. A third passing effort resulted in my ship driv-

ing its nose far into the murk of the ocean floor.

"Foul play," I decided instantly.

By focusing a portion of his many propelling rays upon an imaginary spot in the fluid directly behind him, Mr. Karp was creating backwashes and cross-currents powerful enough to have floundered a battleship.

EVERY way I turned, there was Mr. Karp, fiendishly churning the waters into course-tangling tempests. Even when I rose to a point where the sunlight could be seen shimmering off the tacky waste materials which the Piscites had released in mining, Mr. Karp preceded me. Although his lifting repulsers failed to hoist him to my altitude, the barrage from his topside tubes whipped the lighter upper levels about so viciously any passing thrust therein would have been akin to suicide.

"The crisis," I said.

The spheres Mr. Karp was expressing would assure the Piscites—and Mars—a suspension of the death sentence. By winning, he would land a discouragingly large order, and by expressing the rest of the pre-mined thrilium, thus extending Mars' period of life expectancy approximately two months, his company would gain system-wide fame—and more orders.

It was entirely possible that, during those two months, a method might be found to insulate the Piscites, or to heat their medium so the northern deposits could be mined. In those same two months, Globe Gliders might likewise devise a ship capable of navigating this medium at the necessary speed.

If both premises were successful—and Mars was promised another thousand years of atmosphere—Mr. Karp's company would, obviously, monopolize the transportation field. Uneek's agencies would fold and my office as Planet

Manager would no longer be available to anyone.

I would not, however, be jobless. Captain Smith, my creditor, would see that I did not lack potatoes to whittle.

"Frightful," I admitted.

Not until I discovered myself stretching to keep my nose above the cabin's water level did I realize still another complication had set in. Obviously, as the air locks had closed, a bit of debris had become lodged in the door cracks, allowing a disastrous seepage.

I debated a death by drowning. Would it help my company?

"Decidedly not," I concluded.

I must then leave the field, rendered hors de combat. Sadly, I pointed my ship's nose upward only to find that Mr. Karp, apparently, had been anticipating such a maneuver.

Every spare ray he possessed was churning the murky liquids above me and, although I even tried reverse, each attempt to gain the surface threw me out of control.

Catching breaths haphazardly, I hurled my brain into action. Speed superiority had been proven. But not power. With my face against the cabin ceiling to steal the last scant inch of air remaining, I drove my ship up squarely against the focal point of Mr. Karp's water-rending rays.

POWER against power. The supreme test. My Uneek shuddered at the contact, then slowly swung to face the bitter challenge, head-on. A breathless instant passed while both ships seemed to be girding their loins, then—

I rammed the throttle home at the very instant I felt Mr. Karp's invisible rays kick madly back against my hull. All my jets thundered. Bow plates buckled in protest. Waters churned. Then, my peerless craft moved forward, slowly at first, then faster and faster

until, with a masterful side-slip and roll, I flung those blocking rays off and down.

Mr. Karp's Glider spun for the depths as I zoomed upward to crash the surface into glorious sunlight. My ship leaped joyfully as it ripped free of the cloying liquid. Like broken shackles, the fluids spun in every direction, hissing under the blinding white rocket blasts. I played all levers, and as the water cascaded from the cabin, I leveled off and went roaring on for Piscity's three chimneys.

I had been driven from the field. Through circumstances beyond my control, my company would suffer an inestimable loss in prestige. Mr. Karp would quickly right his vessel and drive on to fame and fortune. Fickle Mars would rush to purchase an inferior product and destroy my future.

But I still doggedly refused to admit defeat.

I glanced at the speedometer. It registered three hundred and eighty miles an hour—with the throttle only half on. My agile brain leaped into action. Since we had not been restricted to ocean travel, this plunge into a less dense medium had proven my salvation. I would win. The failure of Mr. Karp's repulsers to find adequate footing would keep his Glider well below the surface, never to approach this speed.

Even more: a fleet of Uneeks could dart from the ocean directly above the northern mines into the thin upper levels.

Mars would yet be saved—if the mines could be worked.

How far was the run? I looked back and my last fears of a Globe Glider landslide of sales to these Piscites—or, for that matter, to the combined civilizations of Mars—vanished. Mr. Karp would not be able to inflict his inferior product upon the Martians.

For there would be no Martians.

I understood as quickly the identity of the waste materials, variously referred to as crudes, unctuous fluids and hydrocarbons. To mine the thrilium, the Piscites had blasted below the hydrocarbon strata, thus liberating countless gallons of petroleum, a valueless, little-known product in this age of magnesium fuels and chloridic lubricants.

Since their environment prevented any effective disposal, and because they had other means of aerating their medium, the Piscites had allowed the crude oils, evidence of which I had seen in Piscity, to spread throughout the Sea of Piscar.

My hypo-magnesium blasts had ignited this highly inflammable fluid with the result that the ocean was now an inferno. The Piscites' aloofness was explained. The danger of a visitor's rocket exhaust firing their homeland was too great.

I DROPPED my sealed cases of thrilium through the mounting flames but, before fleeing for Port Terrestrial, I made a last intensive survey, recalling that, often in the past, I was able to turn seeming disaster into triumph.

I had won the race, bested Mr. Karp and established the superiority of my product. I had solved the Piscites' transportation problem. A fleet of Uneeks could easily handle the volume of thrilium needed to keep the compounders at their business of bolstering the thinning atmosphere of Mars.

But only Piscites could mine the thrilium.

And, quite obviously, there would be no Piscites.

They were below me now, hundreds upon thousands, writhing their terrible agonies in the ghastly conflagration. Time and again, I saw white bellies flash and as suddenly disappear as the fish-

men convulsed their tenacles about their charring bodies and sank one-by-one from sight.

But infinitely worse: I saw the flames begin eating deeper and deeper into that oil-impregnated sea, and I knew it would only be a matter of time before the entire area, top to bottom, would be a boiling, blazing, steaming caldron in which not one living thing could hope for salvation.

Piscity, its peoples, their secret compounders—even the remote mines—would vanish forever in that crematory.

On my desk at Port Terrestrial, I found two delayed communications. One contained credit slips and a ticket, assigning me first-class passage on the spaceliner, INTERVOID, leaving within the hour on its maiden voyage for the planetary system of distant Altair.

Since the time seemed right for me to embark upon a well-earned three months' vacation with pay, I refrained from opening the second communication, and even a third which was handed me as I climbed nimbly up the INTERVOID'S gangplank, until we had reached a point far out in space.

The second message, to my great surprise, was a delayed notice stating that my campaign among the Piscites was a direct violation of a company order and, as a result, I was being unconditionally and gratefully removed for all time from the payroll.

The third communication, obviously composed after the campaign, was likewise from Harmon T. Dee, Manager of Interplanetary Sales, and it read,

Suggest you consult early earthen history (Mesopotamia—3200 B. C.) regarding properties of petroleum. Lighter, insoluble crudes still burning on Sea of Piscar. Water below being heated to livable temperature. Piscites, after brief hysterical period of warming selves, starting compounders with your

thrillium and dispatching crack mining squads to northern deposits. Due to deluge of rush orders from overjoyed Piscites, fleet of new 6-ton, 80-jet Uneek stratoexpresses soon to pour off assembly lines. Mr. Karp long overdue and believed lost. Captain Smith being cabled full expenses. All Martian agencies being swamped with orders. Disre-

gard previous spacegram. Offering you newly created office of Field Manager of Intersystem Sales at reasonable increase in salary. Complete line of Uneek demonstrators following you to Altair on first freighter. Happy sales and oceans of love, you (deleted) firebug!

Harmon T.

HAVE A DATE

By WILLIS WHITE

Nature made a mistake when she made the date tree and science has had to step in and fix things up!

THE date-grower is the only agriculturist who has to serve as match-maker for his crop. Nature created palms of two sexes, male and female, but she forgot to assign the task of pollination to an insect and so man must take over the job. The growers perform the task in two ways: one is to dust the female blooms with powder puffs of pollen and the other is to tie a sprig of male blossoms among the female buds.

The entire problem of date culture is very complex. Dates grown from seed are never true to type and so this method is seldom used.

When the male and female palms are five years old, they proceed to raise a family. The female produces from ten to twenty daughter offshoots and the male produces ten to twenty son offshoots. This goes on for about ten to fifteen years and then the palms stop producing offshoots, but do continue to bear fruit for at least another two hundred years or more.

It seems that the palms were created to be a trouble-maker for their growers. The bunches of dates will not ripen all at once like a bunch of grapes, but require that the picker examine each bunch about twenty-five times during the harvesting season to pick the dates that have ripened between visits. And then there is the problem of growing. The palm tree often grows as high as one hundred feet, which makes the cost of ladders needed to reach the dates too expensive. The grower, therefore, has to remove a palm tree if it exceeds fifty feet.

The date-growing industry in the United States is centered in the Coachella and Imperial Valleys

of California, the Salt River, Yuma, and Cosa Grande valleys of Arizona. Thirty years ago these valleys produced only .0001 per cent of the dates sold in this country. Today these same valleys produce about twelve per cent of our needs and the growers are looking to the day when the United States will be self-sufficient in date production.

The usual arrangement of a palm grove is to space the palms thirty feet apart with fifty female palms planted for each male palm. The palm trees do not produce any dates until they are about six years old and for six years the grower must watch his palms and care for them without any income. But, once they start to produce they will continue way past his lifetime.

One major problem for the grower is to protect his date crop from rain and the effects of a high humidity during the harvesting season. If any moisture forms on the date during this season, the ripening dates will break through their thin skins, which causes the formation of a mold, and the date becomes worthless. Therefore, just before the harvesting season begins in September, the growers go around and put a paper covering on all the date clusters to protect them until the harvesting is completed in January.

Since the date is about seventy-five per cent sugar, it is often eaten as a candy substitute and this use will have added importance if the manufacture of candy is curtailed by the sugar rationing. Moreover, the date is not only delicious, but it is very healthful.

THE END

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